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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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STATE SENATE COMMITTEE TO HOLD HEARINGS ON GLOBAL TRADE AGREEMENTS

On Wednesday, May 16, from 9 to 11 am, in Room 3191 of the State Capitol Building, the Senate Select Committee on International Trade Policy and State Legislation, chaired by State Senator Sheila James Kuehl (D-23), and the Senate Committee on Banking, Commerce and International Trade, chaired by State Senator Mike Machado (D-5), will co-host **a hearing to examine growing concerns about the effect of international trade agreements on the ability of the state of California to enforce its labor, environmental and other laws.**

The hearing will take place in the context of a growing national discussion about the status of state law regulating labor practices and environmental health and safety in the face of international trade agreements that are entered into outside of electoral processes and adjudicated outside of courts. For example, Canadian corporations have utilized NAFTA provisions to challenge California's efforts to halt the contamination of drinking water with the toxic gasoline additive MTBE. The proposed Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) would expand such provisions and invite further opposition to California law.

Officials of the office of the United States Trade Representative were invited to testify at Wednesday's hearings, but declined to do so. Scheduled witnesses include Lon Hatamiya, Secretary of the California Technology, Trade and Commerce Agency; Dave Naftzger of the National Conference of State Legislators; Martin Wagner, of the Earthjustice Environmental Defense Fund; and Dr. Robert Stumberg of the Harrison Institute for Public Law, Georgetown University.

"If California were a country, we'd have the sixth largest economy in the world," says Senator Kuehl. "Obviously, we're a major player in the global economy and, as a commercial center for the Pacific Rim, the last state that would want to choke off trade. Nevertheless, we also have a strong, permanent interest in enforcing the laws we have written that protect the health, safety and prosperity of our workforce and our environmental health as well. We cannot allow agreements that are not subject to public scrutiny or input to undo the will of the voters. We can and we will maintain long-term environmental safety and economic health for our workforce, as well as for investors."

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